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THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE: THE CONTINUING SEARCH FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT

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THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE: THE CONTINUING SEARCH FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT

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NARRATOR: PERSPECTIVE, on an issue of international concern. In this edition, the Question of Palestine: the Continuing Search for a Peace Settlement. I am Mahbub Ahmad.

Cut 1
MIRZA
UN Asian Regional
Seminar and NGO Symposium
18-22 December 1989
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Over the years, the Asian countries have joined in the important efforts undertaken at the United Nations to bring a just peace to the Middle east, which would also ensure the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. These efforts have been intensified in the past two years and the participation and support of the Governments and the peoples of Asia for the peace process in the Middle East constitutes a valuable contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive solution of the Middle East conflict.

NARRATOR: Excerpts from the Secretary-General's message to the Twenty-Third United Nations Seminar and Sixth NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, held recently in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The message was being read by the Secretary-General's Representative to the Seminar, Naseem Mirza, who is Chief of the UN Division for Palestinian Rights. This series of Regional Seminars, together with the NGO Symposiums, is part of the continuing process in the search for a just and comprehensive solution. This is how Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, viewed the seminar:

Cut 2
OMAR
ibid.

In striving to raise the level of awareness of the facts and developments relating to the Question of Palestine, the seminar and symposium are important means in an essential educating process.

It helps to correct misinformation and distortions of actual developments in the occupied territories. They provide additional forums to table the Palestinian side of the story, to bring the truth across, and to provide the facts for independent and honest assessment. It keeps the world seized with critical developments

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in a tumultuous part of the globe. It remains a constant reminder that a whole nation of Palestinians cannot continue to be denied their homeland.

NARRATOR: But why hold such Seminars in the first place? For over 40 years, the United Nations has continued its tireless efforts to bring about a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. To this end, 15 years ago, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established. Within a year of its establishment, the Committee formulated a set of recommendations which included a two-stage plan for the return of the Palestinians to their homes and property, a timetable for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territory, and the endorsement of the intrinsic right of the Palestinians to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty. The Chairman of the Committee, Absa Claude Diallo of Senegal, presided over the Seminar:

Cut 3
DIALLO
ibid.

By its resolution 31/20 of 24 November 1976, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed those recommendations "as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine". Those recommendations have been endorsed every year since 1976 at the regular sessions of the General Assembly by an increasingly large number of votes. However, despite the urgent and repeated appeals regularly addressed by the General Assembly and the Committee to the Security Council, the Council has so far been unable to take all the necessary measures to implement those recommendations.

The Committee has nevertheless continued to pursue its efforts, both at the United Nations and in other appropriate forums, to further mobilize world public opinion in support of the Palestinian cause and to make it more aware of the urgent need to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. To that end, it has organized, since 1980, a number of seminars and symposia, such as this one, as well as international meetings for non-governmental organizations, to mobilize official support and international public opinion in favour of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

NARRATOR: The Seminar adopted by consensus a document containing a set of conclusions and recommendations. The participants expressed their conviction that new developments relating to the Question of Palestine have created a new momentum for bringing about a solution to this complex and dangerous conflict on the basis of resolutions of the United Nations and within its framework. Ransford Cline-Thomas has been studying the Seminar document. He has a summary:

Cut 4
CLINE-THOMAS
United Nations Radio

In its conclusions and recommendations, the Seminar welcomed the declaration of independence proclaiming the State of Palestine, as a positive contribution towards a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. The Seminar noted with satisfaction the increased number of States which in 1989 had cast votes in favour of an international peace conference on the Middle East. The participants noted the opening of the dialogue between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and called for that dialogue to be expanded. The Seminar Report states that the participants noted the wide international agreement that solution of the Middle East conflict should be based on withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories including Jerusalem; respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region, including Israel and Palestine; and recognition of the Palestinian peoples right to self-determination in their own state. In addition, participants noted their concern at continued human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territory and appealed to the Security Council to take steps to ensure the physical protection of the Palestinian people under occupation.

NARRATOR: During the course of the Seminar, the inter-relationships and similarities between the struggle for self-determination of the Palestinian people and the struggle for freedom, dignity and equality in South Africa, was explored. The Acting Chairman of the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid, Guennadi Oudovenko of the Ukrainian SSR, emphasized that the questions of Palestine and apartheid are of the gravest concern of the international community:

Cut 5
OUDOVENKO
ibid.

Both problems emanate from the denial of the right of self-determination to the peoples concerned under their legitimate representatives. Regrettably, all attempts made so far to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, as well as to bring about the end of apartheid, have failed. This seminar is also meeting at a time when both oppressed people of South Africa and Palestine are rising against occupation and inhuman treatment. At a cost of tremendous suffering and loss of human lives they are showing daily, as never before, their determination to uphold their inalienable rights to freedom and dignity. The intifadah in the occupied territories and the Mass Democratic Movement in South Africa represented the culmination and reaffirmation of their struggle, not only to confront repression, but to demonstrate their respective unity for freedom in the struggle.

The Special Committee of the United Nations Against Apartheid has been following, with deep concern, the increasing relations between Israel and South Africa. The issue of collaboration, especially in the military and nuclear fields between Israel and South Africa, has been and continues to be a matter of concern to many Governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations.

NARRATOR: In panel discussions during the Seminar, various panelists voiced their concerns about prospects for peace negotiations. Dr. Hana Mikhail Ashrawi, Dean of the School of Arts at Birziet University in Ramallah in the West Bank, expressed support for an open agenda for an internationally supervised dialogue as a preparatory step for convening the international conference:

Cut 6
ASHRAWI
ibid.

We must not have pre-delivered assurances, under the euphemism of confidence-building matters, as the euphemism for imposed one-sided concessions. We are the people who are under occupation, we are being brutalized. We are the ones who don't trust the military might of the occupier. And we are the ones who have the strength and the courage to commit ourselves to peaceful resolution, to a peaceful settlement. So, it is not a lack of security that should be our main concern as Palestinians and as NGOs in this field, but rather, what is equitable? What is seriously concerned with the rights of both peoples? But primarily, it is the right, it is the protection of the victims that we should all care about, at this stage. We must not also project hypothetical problems in the future in order to start formulating solutions, and therefore, get bogged down in a morass of abstract problems. Let us see what we can do with the reality now. There's nothing wrong with planning for the future but there is a reality that has an urgency that is in dire and pressing need for attention and for solution.

NARRATOR: Former United States Congressman Paul Findley, another panelist, cautioned against the international community investing too heavily in the convening of an international peace conference. The focus, he said, must be on justice for the Palestinians, not simply opening conference doors:

CUT 7
FINDLEY
ibid.

Let all possible voices be raised, without equivocation, for the objective of statehood for the Palestinians. Let the world community declare clearly that it, too, will settle for nothing less.

I feel that the primary battle in the struggle for Palestinian rights still must be fought and won in the United States, where the call for Palestinian statehood is heard only occasionally now and rarely from anyone in public office.

The world community, I think, should center its attention on the American countryside. Here in Kuala Lumpur, we are preaching to

the converted. The American countryside on the other hand, is filled with heathen, if you'll pardon the expression, who for the most part, have little knowledge of the gospel that we all preach. They are oblivious of America's responsibility for Israeli behavior. They are oblivious, also, to the ability of the United States to alter Israeli behavior.

NARRATOR: Some of the panelists pointed to important changes in attitudes on the Palestine question, despite a somewhat conservative policy with regard to diplomatic recognition of the State of Palestine as proclaimed by the Palestine National Council. Dr. Ron MacIntyre of the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch, New Zealand explains:

CUT 8
MacIntyre
ibid.

"Statistically, we can say that well over 90 per cent, 97 per cent is a more accurate estimation, of the member states of the UN are now committed to a two-state solution, based on a partition formula utilizing UN mediation and the involvement of the PLO on an equal footing with Israel and the other major actors at an international peace conference. But two states in particular resist any involvement with those resolutions, those two states we state again, are the United States and Israel.

NARRATOR: What then should be the future course of action? Former Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie of Malaysia offered this final thought:

CUT 9
Shafie
ibid.

The struggle for Palestine must continue until a satisfactory solution is achieved. In the meantime, within Palestine, the non-violent approach, AHIMSA, must continue. Outside Palestine, particularly the West, more information, more friends of Palestine, must be developed to remove the ignorance and prejudice that so far have plagued the Palestinian people.

NARRATOR: This has been Perspective, the Question of Palestine: the Continuing Search for a Peace Settlement. The programme was produced by the international staff of United Nations Radio. I am Mahbub Ahmad.